

Mario Poceski (ed.)

Communities of Memory and Interpretation

Hamburg Buddhist Studies 10

Series Editors:

Steffen Döll | Michael Zimmermann



Numata Center
for Buddhist Studies

Mario Poceski (ed.)

Communities of Memory and Interpretation

**Reimagining and Reinventing
the Past in East Asian Buddhism**

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Dedicated to Robert Buswell,
with gratitude and respect

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Foreword

About Hamburg Buddhist Studies

Ever since the birth of Buddhist Studies in Germany more than one hundred years ago, Buddhism has enjoyed a prominent place in the study of Asian religions. The University of Hamburg continues this tradition by focusing research capacities on the religious dimensions of South, Central, and East Asia, and making Buddhism a core subject for students of the Asien-Afrika-Institut. The Numata Center for Buddhist Studies is proud to have found a home at one of Europe's pioneering academic institutions. With its *Hamburg Buddhist Studies* book series, it honors the University's long-standing commitment to research in the field of Buddhist Studies and aims to share its results with both the academic community and the wider public.

Today, Buddhist Studies as an academic discipline makes use of a broad spectrum of approaches and methods. The field covers contemporary issues as much as it delves into the historical aspects of Buddhism. Similarly, the questions shaping the field of Buddhist Studies have broadened. Understanding present-day Buddhist phenomena—and how such phenomena are rooted in and informed by a distant past—is not at all an idle scholarly exercise. Rather, it has become clear that fostering the understanding of one of the world's major religious traditions is a crucial obligation for modern multicultural societies in a globalized world.

Accordingly, *Hamburg Buddhist Studies* addresses Buddhism as one of the great traditions of philosophical thought, religious praxis, and social life. Its publications, we hope, will be of interest to scholars of religious studies and specialists in Buddhism, but also aim at confronting Buddhism's rich heritage with questions whose answers might not easily be deduced by the exclusive use of historical and philological research methods. Such issues require the penetrating insight of scholars who approach Buddhism from a broad range of disciplines, building upon and yet going beyond the solid study of texts and historical evidence.

We are convinced that *Hamburg Buddhist Studies* contributes to opening up the field to those who may have no training in the classical source languages of the Buddhist traditions but approach the topic against the background

of their own disciplinary interests. With this book series, we would also like to encourage a wider audience to take an interest in the academic study of the Buddhist traditions.

About this Volume

The originality of Mario Poceski's collection of essays lies in integrating a sophisticated theoretical framework with the study of rich and varied source materials. On a more abstract level, the contributors to the present volume take up his argument that religious identity is informed to a significant extent by remembrance. Such remembrance may be both individual and communal, but it is invariably restricted by internal and external factors, motivated by a certain agenda, and—as a shared practice among participants in a given community—not merely reflective but also creative. As such, the community of memory really turns out to be a community of interpretation that, by the very act of remembering, continually reimagines and reinvents itself. This idea is elaborated upon in five chapters that cover large parts of the East Asian Buddhist tradition—China, Taiwan, and Japan—and some one-and-a-half millennia of religious history. Poceski has given his authors free reign as to the detail of their analyses and discussions, as well as the length of their papers, and this is a very good thing: The volume's essays delve deep into their sources in order to show that to remember may mean to imagine and to distort, to represent and to forget, all at the same time, and thereby to construct the identity of one's religious tradition and, ultimately, of one's religious self.

Michael Zimmermann and Steffen Döll

Contributors

Wendi L. Adamek is an associate professor in the Department of Classics and Religion at the University of Calgary and holder of the Numata Chair in Buddhist Studies. She specializes in Chinese Buddhism, and her publications include *The Mystique of Transmission* and *The Teachings of Master Wuzhu*.

Jinhua Chen is a professor of East Asian Buddhism in the Department of Asian Studies at the University of British Columbia. His research covers East Asian state–church relationships, monastic hagiographical and biographical literature, Buddhist sacred sites, relic veneration, Buddhism and technological innovation in medieval China, Buddhist translations, and manuscript culture. His numerous publications include *Legend and Legitimation: The Formation of Tendai Esoteric Buddhism in Japan*; he is also the co-editor of six books, including *Buddhism and Peace: With a Focus on the Issues of Violence, and Wars and Self-sacrifice*.

Steffen Döll is Numata Professor of Japanese Buddhism at the University of Hamburg, Germany. His research focuses on Buddhist philosophy and history, the processes of cultural transfer in East Asia, and Japanese intellectual and literary traditions. He is author of *Im Osten des Meeres: Chinesische Emigrantenmönche und die frühen Institutionen des japanischen Zen-Buddhismus* (East of the Ocean: Chinese Emigrant Monks and the Early Institutions of Japanese Zen Buddhism, 2010) and several articles on historical issues related to East Asian religions and cultures.

Mario Poceski is a professor of Buddhist Studies and Chinese Religions at the Religion Department, University of Florida. His numerous publications include *The Records of Mazu and the Making of Classical Chan Literature* (Oxford 2015), *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to East and Inner Asian Buddhism* (Blackwell 2014, ed.), *Introducing Chinese Religions* (Routledge 2009), and *Ordinary Mind as the Way: The Hongzhou School and the Growth of Chan Buddhism* (Oxford 2007).

Stefania Travagnin is an assistant professor of religion in Asia and director of the Centre for the Study of Religion and Culture in Asia at the University of Groningen, Netherlands. Her research and publications explore Buddhism in modern China and Taiwan. She is the editor of *Religion and Media in China: Insights and Case Studies from the Mainland, Hong Kong and Taiwan* (Routledge, 2016). Her forthcoming monograph is titled *Yinshun and his Exposition of Madhyamaka: New Studies of the Da Zhidu Lun in Twentieth-century China and Taiwan*.

Preface and Acknowledgments

The origins of this book go back to a conference on the same theme, titled “Communities of Memory: Reimagining and Reinventing the Past in East Asian Buddhism,” held at the University of Hamburg in May 2014. The conference participants included ten scholars from Europe and North America. The original plan was to have a chapter from each conference participant, based on his or her presentation. Eventually, we ended up with five contributions. Unlike the conference papers (which included additional coverage of Japan and two papers on Korea), the book’s coverage turned out to be somewhat skewed towards China. The smaller number of contributions opened up the possibility of having longer chapters, and each of the five scholars featured in the volume readily made good use of that opportunity.

Two of the chapters (by Chen and Poceski) differ from the original conference presentations. As publications based on their presentations ended up coming out in print before this volume saw the light of day, the two authors wrote new chapters especially for this volume. In editing the individual chapters, I tried to impose a sense of stylistic uniformity and thematic coherence. At the same time, I did not push the impulse toward standardization very far, so there are minor stylistic differences among the individual chapters, based on their authors’ choices and predilections.

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the support I received from the two sponsors of the Hamburg conference: the Numata Center for Buddhist Studies at the University of Hamburg, and the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. I am especially thankful to the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation for their generous support. In addition to providing me with a Humboldt fellowship that enabled me to spend eighteen months of research in Germany (during the 2013–2015 period), the foundation also awarded me a publication grant for this volume. I also greatly appreciate the friendship and support of my academic host in Germany, Michael Zimmermann, who made the conference possible and suggested publishing the book as part of the Hamburg Buddhist Studies series. Likewise, I wish to acknowledge the help I received from Steffen Döll, the co-director of the Numata Center for

Buddhist Studies, especially during the final stages of book production. Heartfelt thanks also go to Ruth Sheng for the wonderful calligraphy that graces the book's cover.

I wish to thank all contributors for their participation in this worthwhile project, and for their dedication to high quality scholarship. I want to offer special thanks to my teacher and mentor at UCLA, Robert Buswell, who not only guided my graduate study, but has also continued to offer his unstinting support and wise advice throughout the course of my subsequent academic career. Since the genesis of my chapter included in this book goes back to a paper I wrote for a panel held in his honor at an annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, it seems fitting to dedicate this volume to him.

Mario Poceski
Gainesville, Florida
March 2, 2017

Introduction

Mario Poceski

This volume contains a collection of essays centered on the central themes of remembrance, reinvention, and reinterpretation of the past in East Asian Buddhism. The book covers a wide range of historical periods, from China's Tang 唐 dynasty (618–907) to the present, as well as a broad geographical area (China and Japan). It also involves a number of traditions of Buddhism, even though there is a greater focus on the Chan/Zen school (evidenced in three of the five chapters). While each chapter is written independently and focuses on narrower topic(s) or issue(s), in a broad sense the book as a whole is meant to shed light on larger patterns of communal remembrance, textual production, ideological construction, interpretative engagement, and historical representation within East Asian Buddhism. It also aims to assess the impact of those patterns on the constructions of distinctive religious identities and the formulations of specific visions of Buddhist orthodoxy.

The individual chapters explore some of the multivalent processes and complex issues involved in the remembering, recording, and reinventing of the past, which at times encompassed a variety of legendary or mythical elements. The authors examine how at different historical junctures Buddhist leaders, writers, or adherents constituted or appropriated “historical” narratives by selectively remembering or reimagining their tradition's past. Such processes were often undertaken in response to specific institutional developments and fluctuating socioreligious predicaments. They were also influenced by changing doctrinal frameworks and evolving soteriological paradigms.

The dominant traditions of Buddhist historiography played important roles in the demarcation of orthodoxy and the forming of religious identities. Consequently, often they were as concerned with legitimizing the present and charting the future as they were with curating the past or formulating accurate accounts of earlier figures and events. By examining the provenance, character, and function of a range of traditional historical narratives and other

relevant sources, this volume aims to survey how the larger historical trajectories of East Asian Buddhism can be construed as a series of creative interpretative refractions or distortions. These, in turn, can be understood as expressions of religious piety as well as tools of ideological dominance.

Community and Remembrance

An important part of the forging and maintaining of a common religious identity is the existence of a shared vision or understanding of the past, which is often infused with mythopoetic elements.¹ The communal remembrance of the exemplary deeds and edifying statements of important founders or other heroic figures, the unfolding of seminal events, and the like, is typically integrated with other aspects of an enduring tradition. These include the establishment of ritual spaces and observances, the enactment of spiritual practices, the codification of literary genres and other means of communication, and the setting up of institutional structures. Processes of this kind are observable in a wide spectrum of religious traditions, as well as in other spheres of human life, including politics.

Within the context of Buddhism, communal remembrances can unfold at a general or pan-Buddhist level, as the story of the “religion” is retold and reinterpreted by each successive generation. Notwithstanding the presence of certain anchoring elements—such as the main events in the life and ministry of the Buddha—the interlocking narratives that constitute the central storyline inevitably undergo various changes with the passage of time or as the tradition moves across different lands and interacts with diverse cultures. At the same time, analogous processes also unfold within the framework of narrower groups, movements, or traditions, such as the various schools or sects of East Buddhism (Chan/Zen, Tiantai/Tendai, Shingon, Pure Land, etc.), some of which are discussed in this volume.

The communal remembrance and safeguarding of the past can serve as a glue that binds together a group of believers and practitioners, such as Chan monks or members of a cultic movement. It provides them with a sense of common identity, which incorporates a collective heritage, shared values, and a higher sense of purpose. Often the group’s communal remembrances (and aspirations) are expressed via the medium of stories about a celebrated past, although the same messages can also be set in stone or communicated

¹ This section reiterates some of the arguments made in my *The Records of Mazu and the Making of Classical Chan Literature*, esp. pp. 24-28.

via sacred sites and monuments, which are instilled with elevated significance. Since the shared act of remembering the past is at the core of the group's collective identity, inevitably the retelling and transmission of key narratives about its "history" is a central and lasting aspect of religious life. In that sense, a religious group can be understood to constitute a community of memory.²

The seemingly universal propensity to look back in time represents an essentially conservative impulse, which to varying degrees can be found in virtually all religious traditions. Nonetheless, despite the various practices and rituals that aim to recapture or commemorate key elements of the past, the true nature and precise make-up of the past remain elusive. Ultimately, neither individuals nor groups can have direct access to the past, which is always remembered in a partial, distorted, and subjective manner. Invariably, remembrance of the historicized past is colored by all sorts of external exigencies, situational contexts, and social mandates. There are also psychological factors at play, which take us back to the inner workings of human consciousness and the nature of memory. Given the innate imperfection and fallibility of human memory—individual and communal—the past remains a contestable territory and can be burdened with tensions or incongruities. It is always open to various types of interpretations, judgments, and reassessments, and is laden with a multitude of uncertainties, distortions, ambiguities, or selective omissions.

The formation and circulation of collective memories, which serve as central elements of communal or religious identity, involves the complex interweaving of fact and fiction, myth and history, fantasy and reality. Despite their failure to live up to specific standards of empirical evidence or conventional reality, the symbols and narratives deployed by specific Buddhist communities to convey their shared remembrances and ideals should be taken seriously by scholars of religion. After all, they are central elements of religious life, as understood or experienced by a range of people engaged with enduring beliefs and traditions.

If we carefully unpack the complex assemblages and multilayered components that constitute these kinds of narratives—along with the elements of material culture that accompany them—we can find all sorts of interesting and valuable information about religious trends, mores, outlooks, and

² For the basic concept of community of memory, see Robert N. Bellah, et al, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, pp. 152-55, and Michael Pickering and Emily Keightley, "Communities of memory and the problem of transmission," esp. pp. 119-21.

traditions. The information we uncover can also pertain to various beliefs, ideals, doctrines, and practices, as they have developed and changed in light of constantly evolving religious needs, cultural predilections, and sociopolitical actualities. In the end, the relevant sources afford us glimpses into the lives, values, and aspirations of past and present adherents—along with the inner workings of the communities that surround them. As an added bonus, they help us trace larger developmental patterns and historical trajectories, including those of important religious groups or sectarian movements, such as those examined in this volume.

Interpretation

Memories and histories are not straightforward. The construction and transmission of historicized remembrances tends to involve convoluted processes that can be selective and creative (often at the same time), and tend to position the past in relation to the present. Collective memory is not fixed or static, as it gradually changes over time and across generations, subtly and unbeknown to most.³ That remains the case even though it revolves around key reference points, as expressed in sacred rituals and traditional lore, or written down in canonical texts and related historical documents. Notwithstanding the certitudes disseminated by promoters of entrenched orthodoxies or unquestioned dogmas, the contents of historically inflected memories are open to reassessment and reinterpretation. Accordingly, the transmission of memories over time involves ongoing negotiation and interpretation. In that sense, a community of memory can also be understood as a community of interpretation.

When dealing with premodern contexts, we know about these kinds of memories primarily because they were expressed in written documents, although there are also other sources of information, such as ritual sites or art objects. While specific Buddhist texts might have certain original meanings (as designed by their authors), their reading by later generations of adherents often tends to be culturally constructed, as suggested by proponents of reader-response criticism.⁴ Namely, the deceptively straightforward act of reading inevitably involves a fair amount of interpretation, which can operate at an unconscious level. That is especially important in

³ For a discussion of collective memory, see Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory*.

⁴ See Jane P. Tompkins, *Reader-response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-structuralism*.

highly literate religious milieus, like those we encounter in East Asian Buddhism, especially at the elite level.

The reading of texts and the discussion of the ideas communicated in them always takes place within specific contexts, and it involves all sorts of emotive responses, value judgments, and subjective interpretations. The factors that influence individual acts of interpretation can be of different types: psychological, social, cultural, or religious. Political backdrops, economic imperatives, and institutional predicaments can also influence the interpretative strategy or the exegetical process. All too often, various sorts of ideological agendas, emotional attachments, philosophical perspectives, or religious commitments influence the ways individuals and groups decode and come to terms with the content of canonical texts or select forms of symbolic representation (such as the lineage genealogies we find in Chan and other schools of East Asian Buddhism).

The interwoven processes of remembrance and interpretation can sometimes also involve a fair amount of self-deception, deflection, or even misinformation. That makes the textual materials and other sources we use for the study of Buddhism that much more complex and challenging. At the same time, it also makes them more remarkable and interesting, inasmuch as they function as rich repositories of information about Buddhist ideals, teachings, and practices, as well as windows into the worlds of the actual communities that espouse and transmit them.

Summary of Contents

The book contains five chapters, roughly organized in a chronological sequence. The journey starts in medieval China and ends in contemporary Taiwan, with an extended stopover in Japan. Much of the coverage revolves around the Chan/Zen traditions of Chinese and Japanese Buddhism. Nonetheless, there is also ample coverage of other Buddhist groups, trends, and teachings, such as the Three Levels movement in medieval China and the newfangled brand of Humanistic Buddhism that developed in modern China and Taiwan.

The first chapter, by Wendi Adamek, explores the somewhat ambiguous traces left by the Three Levels (Sanjie 三階) movement at Baoshan 寶山, where we find rock-cut caves, stelae, and other monuments from the Sui 隋 (589–618) and Tang 唐 (618–907) eras. In her nuanced exploration of the intersections between the site and the movement (which was proscribed on several occasions), Adamek covers a large cross-section of primary sources,

such as liturgical texts and memorial inscriptions, a number of which are translated and subjected to careful analysis. Among the textual elements she uses to establish possible Sanjie affiliation are references to the mortuary ritual of corpse exposure, which appears in the memorial inscriptions for individual monks and nuns. Pointing to both the evidence of Sanjie-associated rituals at Baoshan and the conspicuous lack of explicit mention of the movement and its leading figure, Xinxing 信行 (540–594), she highlights the tenuousness of lineage ideology and sectarian identity, exemplified by the effortless assimilation of radical Sanjie practices into Baoshan's heterogeneous and evolving community of memory.

Jinhua Chen's chapter explores a case of mistaken identity, revolving around a sixth century monk known as Meditation Master He 和禪師. While Chan sources tend to identify him as a disciple of Huike 惠可 (487–593), the putative second patriarch of Chan in China, Chen argues against this misidentification and explores the reasons behind it, including the hegemonic power and influence of later Chan narratives about the tradition's formative growth. His meticulous study, which relies on a range of primary sources such as the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 (Additional Biographies of Eminent Monks), brings to light a wealth of details about this seemingly obscure monk, as well as about several other monks who were his contemporaries. The chapter also includes reflections on the scholarly use of divergent historical narratives, which are often infused with sectarian biases and other distortions, and calls for greater attention to the nature of both the sources and the stories modern scholars try to tell about their medieval subjects.

The central issues of communal remembrance and interpretation are taken up by Mario Poceski in reference to the intertwined process of canonical exegesis and perpetuation of orthodoxy. His chapter centers on the notorious story of Nanquan Puyuan 南泉普願 (749–835) killing a cat, which is among the best-known episodes in traditional Chan literature. It explores some of major problems that surround the interpretative strategies and commentarial treatments extended to this and other stories that depict ostensibly pointless or morally dubious behaviors, including acts of gratuitous violence. By exploring the nature, scope, and impact of Chan exegesis, and taking into account the ideological commitments and institutional forces that shape it, Poceski exposes a pervasive tendency to stick uncritically to a set interpretative scheme that is anchored in a narrow vision of Chan orthodoxy. That stands in stark contrast to the tradition's self-representation as a movement within Buddhism that rejects dogma, challenges the status quo, and is infused with a healthy dose of iconoclasm.

Issues of orthodoxy and identity within the Chan/Zen tradition are also central in Steffen Döll's chapter, which takes us (mostly) to premodern Japan. Its main concern is the notion of lineage, especially as formulated in the Rinzai sect 臨濟宗, which for centuries has served as a linchpin to Zen's claims to uniqueness and superiority vis-à-vis other Buddhist traditions. Building on John McRae's notion of "lineage paradigm," Döll carefully unpacks the main assumption, uses, and problems that surround the notion of lineage, especially when expressed in a schematic manner by means of lineage diagrams. According to him, the tradition's emphasis on lineage, which postulates a direct link to the Buddha and his experience of ultimate awakening, had less to do with accurate historical representation of past events and individuals, and more to do with overriding concerns about identity, transmission, authority, and legitimacy. By highlighting the largely fictional character and ideological function of lineage diagrams, which are construed as models of reality, the chapter problematizes the ways the Chan/Zen tradition has obfuscated its true history and has promoted an exclusivist agenda.

Finally, in the last chapter, Stefania Travagnin explores a case from contemporary Taiwan, which is closely related to parallel developments on the Chinese mainland and touches upon the nature of cross-strait relations. Her analysis centers on the Fuhui Pagoda 福慧塔院 and Yinshun 印順 (1906–2005), the prominent proponent of "Buddhism for the Human Realm" (Renjian fojiao 人間佛教) and one of the leading intellectual figures in contemporary Taiwanese Buddhism. She uses the story of the pagoda as an entry point for a discussion of the history of the community associated with it, which in turn tells us important things about the make-up, growth, and transformation of modern Taiwanese Buddhism. By exploring the circumstances and the reasons behind the pagoda's construction, as well as the meanings that were ascribed to it, the chapter sheds light on key issues in contemporary Chinese and Taiwanese Buddhism. That includes the construction of new Buddhist identities and lineages, which in turn are related to the emergence of a still fragile sense of distinct Taiwanese identity.

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